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smart **Advice for Success!** Business™ matters

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Build Your Sales Base with a Blog

A blog is a great online tool that can help you forge relationships with your customers – and potential customers – in order to solidify and increase your sales base. Reach out to more people online, inform customers, showcase your expertise, and keep customers coming back to your website for more.

What's a blog? A blog, or web log, is a site with regular entries of commentary, graphics, or video. Blogs are becoming effective business tools to augment conventional advertising, drive customers to your website, and convert shoppers into buyers.

Dive right in. Creating and posting blogs can be as easy as creating an e-mail or word processing document. Start today. Register with a blog network, like TypePad or Blogger, and follow their setup instructions. Many blog networks give you a choice of templates and styles from which to choose. Pick one that mirrors your website style and reinforces your brand image.

As soon as you're signed up, write! Write about your business — what you know, whether it be accounting tips or how to choose a contractor. Write with a personal style, but avoid inappropriate commentary. It takes time to build readership, so you have time to fine-tune your writing — post frequently. If you are grammatically challenged, hire a writer or skilled friend to help. Use your blog to talk about your company and industry, showcase new products or services, or offer helpful tips regarding your products or services.

Promote your website, promote your blog. Create links from key phrases in your blog to relevant pages of your website. For example, if you're providing a design tip, you can link the word "design" to a page on your website which discusses

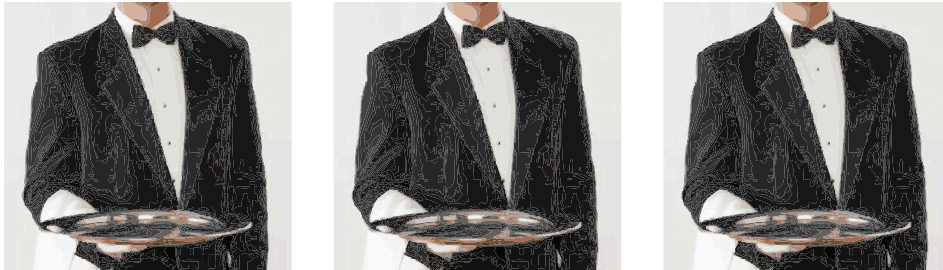


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Catering to the Customer

Customize your products and services to appeal to basic customer groups

Gillette, a division of Proctor & Gamble, had a stronghold when it came to men's shaving products, but they were chasing Schick in the sale of women's razors. That presented a challenge and an opportunity for growth for Gillette. When you look at how Gillette has proceeded to meet the challenge, there's a lesson for businesses of all sizes on how to expand into a new niche.



Evaluate your services or products. Think about the effectiveness of your services and products and evaluate them as if you were the customer. Is there room for improvement? For years women's razors have been little better than a pink version of men's razors, so Gillette saw room for lots of improvement.

Identify the competition. Who's your competition? You may be ahead of them in some areas, but are there niche areas where you feel you're falling behind? Know all you can about your competition – services, products, quality, pricing, etc. Evaluate how you stack up against them and identify areas where you need to improve.

Do some basic research. What products or services does your target market require? Also think about how they will be used. Your current customers are a good place to begin. Gillette researched how women used their products by asking women to try them in their test facility in England. Gillette observed customer behavior, scientifically measured how their products were used, created new products, and retested. You can learn more about your customers by surveying them, or simply by asking them. Start with some of your best clients and look for specific likes and dislikes. Is there a client niche you are having difficulty capturing? Ask those customers what services or products they would like to see offered. By listening to what people want and how they use your products or services, you can begin to customize your offerings and offer additional accessories or services they need.

Customizing your services. In Gillette's case, their research led them to break women into four basic niches based on shaving habits or needs. They then created a series of products for each category. Look for ways you can offer a service or product to a broader customer base by slightly customizing your offering to subcategories of customers. For example, if you've identified two basic customers – ones who want things done in a very detailed manner, and others who want a quick fix, you can customize your services and prices to accommodate each type. Also consider targeting by age group, income level, or activity level.

While it may be easier to stick to one product (or one process for providing services), and you do not want to stretch yourself too thin, it is important that you recognize that one size does not fit all. You may have to adjust or segment your offerings a bit in order to capture a broader audience.

Yellow is the Color for 2009

Pantone, an authority on color and the primary provider of professional color standards for the design industries, has selected warm yellow "Mimosa" as color of the year for 2009.

The color was chosen for its expression of hope and reassurance in a time of uncertainty. Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute, spoke of its reflection of the "nurturing quality of the sun." Yellow is a color of "enlightenment" and Mimosa is expected to be "a hue that sparks imagination and innovation."

Mimosa, and any yellow in general, is an attention getter and it pairs well with any other color. It appeals to men and women and to people of all ages. It can be a great accent color for logos and marketing material, and it is a color that's sure to crop up often in design and fashion in 2009. If used well, mimosa might be the perfect accent color to freshen up your marketing materials, signage, and website.

WHAT'S SWOT?

Want to know more about SWOT, a strategic planning method?

Don't miss the next issue of Smart Business Matters!

Want to Make Your Workplace Greener?

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle to reduce your impact on the environment.

REDUCE

- Reduce the amount of paper you use by printing only what is necessary. Keep regular and redundant backups of all computer files to ensure that you will not lose any necessary documents. If you can, offer customers a way to review statements, purchase orders, etc. online.
- Reduce your energy consumption to reduce waste and reduce your energy costs. Conduct an energy audit. Review machine use, lighting, insulation. Ask employees to come up with innovative ways to save. You might want to offer a prize for the best solution.
- Turn off any machinery that is not used on a regular basis. When practical, replace older machines with more energy efficient models in order to reduce energy use.
- Set your computer and laptop power management settings (for both cord and battery use) to the most efficient energy level settings with which you can comfortably work. Ask staff to shut down computers when they are done for the day.
- Computer peripherals such as desktop hard drives and printers and many other electric devices will continue to draw power if they are plugged in. Separate those items onto a second power strip that you can turn off, or look for reasonably priced “smart” power strips that shut off supply to your peripherals when the computer is off or in sleep mode.
- If you use a company car, consider replacing it with a hybrid vehicle. A hybrid may reduce the impact on the environment while helping you save money at the pump. And, your company’s “green” contribution can be promoted by painting or wrapping that message onto that car.



RECYCLE

- Keep a recycle bin or two in the office. Encourage workers to recycle paper, plastic, cardboard, and whatever materials your local recycling will take. Label bins to indicate what can or cannot be added. Be sure to shred sensitive material first, or turn over sensitive material to a business that shreds and recycles.
- Refill empty printer and copier cartridges whenever possible to reduce waste and cut costs.
- Recycle corrugated cardboard shipping boxes you receive. Or better yet, switch to reusable and returnable packaging and consider asking the supplier for a discount.

REUSE

- Consider all the materials you use in your business. Can any of these materials be used for other purposes after their primary use?
- Reuse file folders by applying fresh labels to the files or by marking the labels with a pencil rather than a pen.
- If you are replacing older computers or machines, check to see if a local non-profit organization needs your old equipment before you trash it. You’ll be helping another struggling organization and reducing waste, and you may also be able to earn tax credits from your donation.

Want to measure how many watts your office uses during a specific period of time? The **Kill A Watt** is an inexpensive meter device that plugs into a power outlet and has an outlet on the front to which you can attach any device (or a power strip containing several devices) you wish to monitor. You can assess how many watts your devices use and continue to measure your energy consumption as you make changes to reduce your energy usage.

“You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.”

– ABRAHAM LINCOLN

es your design services. Once you are posting regularly, promote your blog and focus on building readership. Provide a link to your blog on your website. Encourage friends, business associates, and customers to visit your blog and post a link from their site to your blog.

Little money, big potential impact.

While a blog should not replace other advertising methods, it can add value to your marketing mix. For a small financial outlay, you can position yourself as a leader in your profession, build customer loyalty, drive people to your website, collect customer feedback and ideas, create a conversation between you and your customers, and grow your business.

You can also use third-party blogging software to add a blog directly to your website. If you want to use your own domain, and your web host does not offer the ability to blog, check out blog platforms from third-party providers such as WordPress, Moveable Type, and B2Evolution.

Isn't it Time You Went Green?

Make the world a greener place. *And* keep more green in your wallet.



“Go green” now. It is the socially responsible thing to do to reduce pollution, conserve resources, and work towards achieving a sustainable energy plan. Businesses who get on board now are not only helping the environment, they are keeping more green in their wallets, building loyal customer bases, and creating innovative business solutions to problems that matter to all of us.

Simple steps. There are plenty of simple, easy actions you can take to routinely do your part. Be more aware of the energy you use and how you can reduce consumption. An energy audit (often free from your electric provider) could help you to cut your energy use and expenses in half. Recycle and reuse office items to reduce waste and cut expenses.

Social responsibility. Customers, especially the younger generations, are keen to support socially responsible businesses and can be both loyal and vocal supporters of your business. If your business is legitimately and actively working to make the environment a better place, don't be afraid to talk about what, specifically, you are doing to help the environment. Asking customers to help you achieve your environmental goals and listening to their suggestions can build even greater loyalty. Sponsor a program or event (targeted recycling or awareness campaigns) to garner community support for your business. It may also provide some free advertising.

Green niche. Do you have a business idea that can help the environment? This is a great time to explore its viability. Or can you provide services to this new niche? There are many green start-ups. Consider targeting your services to new companies in this growing niche. Serving worthy businesses with great growth potential can help you get in on the ground floor to grow your business along with theirs.

Helpful green links

Co-op America. www.coopamerica.org: Green advocacy organization that provides tips on how to go green.

Friends of the Earth Scotland. www.foe-scotland.org.uk: Offers an online audit to help you to green your office.

Extreme energy makeover: Home Office edition. ComputerWorld.com <http://www.computerworld.com/action/article.do?command=viewArticleBasic&articleId=9045738>: Robert L. Mitchell tells about how he reduced and saved.

“Touch your customer, and you're halfway there.”

- ESTEE LAUDER